

"In various iterations that story repeated itself over and over," Schenk said. "With acts of profound kindness, at a time of need and loss."

The celebration next Saturday is to do something "nice," Schenk said—choosing with care a word an English teacher advised him long ago to stay away from.

#### WORDS WITH A SIDE OF PIZZA

Words matter to Schenk. Over the years they have achieved a place of importance in his business.

The restaurant in Waitsfield has gardens that grow food for flatbreads and salad, a campfire on the stone patio, and banners printed with Schenk's writings on food, family, community, philosophy, and social issues.

His compositions, which he calls "dedications," appear in the menus at American Flatbread. Schenk has written more than 1,400 over the past 28 years.

"I have often felt as though if I didn't write, the flatbread wasn't complete, it wasn't as good," Schenk said. "Maybe in truth, I was not as good or complete. It provided an internal discipline that I needed."

In his semi-retirement, Schenk, 62, is reading through the archive of his dedications with plans to publish them in a book.

Reading through his dedications, the ones that emerge as most meaningful to him are about his family and the time he spent raising his two children, now grown, Schenk said.

"I'm acutely aware that those days and events are past and will never come again," Schenk said. "The dedications captured something about their childhoods and my experiences that I wouldn't otherwise have."

A dedication called "The Family Bed" is on the porch at American Flatbread.

It reads in part:

"We are together. Laughing and talking, getting ready for bed. 'Read to me first,' cries Willis who is three. I look at Hanna, half grown at eight years, she looks back at me with patience. 'Pick out your books and jump into bed, I'll be with you in just a minute.' (I go downstairs and fill the old stove with big chunks of wood. It is cold for April.) I hop back up, two stairs at a time, and join them in the big bed."

Nearby is a dedication titled "Children and the Kitchen." Schenk wrote:

"Children have a natural curiosity about the goings on in a kitchen. It is important to nurture this curiosity so that they have as their own the skills and care of good cooking. Almost all food work, from the garden to washing dishes, including knife-work, is child-friendly."

#### DREAMING IN THE DIRT

The garden is where Schenk prefers to spend time these days. He has a plot in the staff garden at Flatbread, and he works in a greenhouse at Lareau Farm.

Schenk loves the physical activity of gardening, and being outside in sunlight and fresh air. He has a particular interest in the nutrient content of the soil, and values the way garden work helps produce food that is "nutrient dense" and rich in flavor, Schenk said.

"There's a kind of psychological peace and health that comes with the work," he said. "Our palates really can guide us to health affirming food."

He has built in his garden a structure he calls a "soil invertebrate condominium."

Soil invertebrates, insects and worms, stimulate soil bacteria, which improve the biology and chemistry of the soil. The creatures also aerate the soil, and help with pest control, Schenk said. They allow Schenk to play in the dirt, and peek into that "magic place" where they live.

"I've come to take an enormous amount of happiness from this work, and peace," Schenk said last week in his garden. "As I become older, that peace and well being has become something that I value greatly. My goal wasn't to go out and create a pizza empire. It was to have a healthy and happy life."

He sold his restaurant development group a few years ago, and now works as a Flatbread consultant. Thursday, he trucked buckets of clay gathered at Lareau Farm and sapling alders from a swamp in Roxbury to Rockport, Maine, to build an oven for a new American Flatbread restaurant.

"It was about letting go of my ego," Schenk said of his selling the development group. "When we idealize the American corporate dream and growth, that's what we see and hold up as a model of success."

"I got caught up in someone else's dream. As I grew, I came to realize that it wasn't my dream."

Schenk dreams in the dirt these days, a place he hopes is teeming with activity.

"Systems that are more complex tend to be more stable," he said. "It's stability that we're looking for in our lives."

#### TRIBUTE TO LAURA PECHAITIS

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the career of Laura Pechaitis, a dedicated public servant who has made a profound difference in the lives of thousands of Ohioans. For 13 years, I have been honored to have Laura on my staff, where she has helped veterans dealing with problems large and small. Laura retires on May 8, 2015, after more than 30 years of service to her community.

From the moment Laura contacted my then-congressional office about a job, I should have recognized that I was encountering a woman of uncharacteristic zeal and dedication. Laura wrote to me after she—along with her husband, Theodore, and two sons, Marc and Scott—had moved back home to Ohio from New York. She had worked for 18 years in the New York Assembly for State Representative Michael Bragman as his director of constituent services. During her time in the New York Assembly she helped develop a program used by all assembly offices to track and manage casework. Hiring her should have been an obvious decision, but it was only after she had written to me three times that I finally recognized the dedication and passion of the person I was dealing with. Hiring Laura has made a difference in the lives of thousands of Ohioans.

On my staff, Laura primarily focused her efforts on assisting Ohio's veterans. Our veterans and servicemembers dedicate their lives to our Nation, and Laura worked to make sure that they received the respect, gratitude, and assistance befitting their service. Inspired by her father—a World War II naval veteran—Laura has been committed all of her adult life to serving those who served us. As a student at Miami University, she helped form an auxiliary for the Navy ROTC program, serving as its commander.

She helped all generations of veterans. She helped men who stormed the

beach on D-day secure long-overdue medals they had earned, and she helped recent Iraq war veterans access VA benefits to attend college and transition to civilian life. Her ability to resolve seemingly intractable cases was legendary. For veterans who had been waiting months, she was able to expedite their cases and get them the attention they deserved, many within 24 hours. One constituent had been told by the VA that his claim would take 20 days to process. Frustrated and distraught, he called Laura while driving to the VA clinic. By the time he pulled into the VA clinic, Laura had resolved the issue. Another veteran in Columbus had lived in her house for 27 months, but she was too afraid to unpack out of fear of being evicted. Laura helped ensure that this veteran had the VA benefits that would enable her to stay in her home.

Going above and beyond the call of duty was the norm for Laura. One veteran even had a term for her dedication, dubbing such exemplary service the "typical Pechaitis fashion." Another constituent from Warren was having his TRICARE bills denied by the VA. Not only did Laura have the issue resolved within 24 hours, but she worked to help him reenroll in college and went so far as to put him in touch with a mentor at a local university to make sure he went back to school.

Her drive for public service, however, went beyond veterans. In fact, long before he became the star of the Cleveland Cavaliers, a young LeBron James used to come into my Akron office to spend time with a friend whose mother worked for me. During one of those visits, Laura helped LeBron James register for the draft—the Selective Service draft that is, not the NBA draft.

Since 2006, Laura helped coordinate more than 10,000 cases for veterans and Active-Duty members of the armed services. She brought the same energy and empathy to each one. Laura has been a champion of veterans in Ohio, and the breadth of her impact is remarkable. She has been a model public servant, and I am proud to have worked with her.

Our actions in Congress are closely watched, but what too often goes unnoticed is the work of dedicated staff members whose only goal is to serve those we are elected to represent. I ask that my colleagues join me in thanking Laura Pechaitis for her service to our Nation.

#### VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I was unavoidably detained for rollcall vote No. 196 on cloture on the motion to proceed to H.R. 2048. Had I been present, I would have voted yea.